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INFO ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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SIPDIS
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [KTIP](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: Mixed Messages on Child Labor in the Cotton Sector

CLASSIFIED BY: Holly Lindquist Thomas, P/E Officer, Department of State, Pol-Econ Office; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In conversations in the last few weeks with poloff, UNICEF Representative in Uzbekistan Mahboob Shareef and Child Protection Officer Siyma Barkin have expressed their frustration with the GOU and its efforts to address child labor. Neither Shareef nor Barkin expected an independent assessment to be conducted this fall, as it was getting late in the year to be able to organize an assessment in time to have it carried out, and the GOU had not made any indications that it intended to extend an invitation to the ILO or anyone else this year. UNICEF Regional Director Steven Allen visited Tashkent last week, however, and after extensive meetings with various ministries, he remains hopeful that an assessment this year may be possible. End summary.

Background

¶2. (C) The GOU and UNICEF signed a Work Plan addressing child labor in January 2009. The Plan addressed several goals, including monitoring implementation of Uzbekistan's National Action Plan regarding child labor; raising awareness of national and international legislation on child labor; conducting training programs for labor inspectors, local administrators, teachers, farmers, and other relevant parties; and developing community-based prevention programs. Shareef described it as a "beautiful" plan, but was clearly frustrated with its implementation, and said recently that the Work Plan should not be considered a "living document." During a round table discussion in mid-July at the Uzbek National Human Rights Center, UNICEF's Barkin reported to the group its one bright spot: that UNICEF has made progress with its "awareness raising" campaign, stating that they have held meetings with parents and school administrators in nine provinces, and that they hope to cover four more provinces in the fall. She also stated, however, that very little else has been accomplished under the Plan. Barkin told poloff that her presentation was not well-received by representatives of the GOU. Official press reports of the event did not mention the UNICEF report, and indeed

did not mention the child labor issue at all.

UNICEF Regional Director's Visit

¶3. (C) UNICEF Regional Director Steven Allen met with several ministries during his two-day visit last week, and he remains optimistic about the possibility for progress before this harvest season. He stated that his most positive meeting was with Acting Minister of Labor and Social Protection Aktam Ahmatovich Haritov, who was pleased to be able to announce Deputy Minister of Labor Alimuhamedov as a new point person with whom UNICEF could engage directly on this issue of child labor. Alimuhamedov, however, has been a long-time hardliner on child labor issues. Despite this wrinkle, Allen believes that the designation of a point person is a positive step, and is hoping that Alimuhamedov has been instructed to be more cooperative than he has been in the past. Allen also believes that there is still time for the ILO to do organize and carry out an assessment this fall, if the GOU extends the invitation.

¶4. (C) Allen stated that a few times during his meetings, GOU officials brought up their concerns about an "emotional Congressman" in the United States who has been speaking out about child labor in Uzbekistan, probably referring to the nonbinding

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resolution that was proposed by Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) last spring. Allen had been unaware of the resolution.

Comment

¶5. (C) While it seems that the Uzbek Embassy in Washington suggested that the GOU was ready to invite an ILO assessment, we have not heard as much in Tashkent. At the same time, however, the issue is not off the GOU's agenda. At a meeting at the MFA last week, new Chief of the America's Department Bakhtiyor Ibrogimov told ChargC) that the GOU is "working on a letter." If this letter is an invitation to the ILO, it will be a hugely positive step that will help to quell the international pressure that has building on this issue over the last year. If not, stakeholders, including cotton merchandisers, trade groups, and socially responsible investment firms, are likely to try to increase pressure on Uzbekistan as the cotton harvest approaches. While the GOU has portrayed itself as impervious to such pressure, questions over the Harkin resolution demonstrate that there is indeed some concern over the attention being brought to the issue. End comment.

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